

IDOLATRY CONDEMNED NO. 3071

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"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."
1 John 5:21

THIS is the conclusion of one of the most mysterious, most simple and yet most sublime, of all the divinely-inspired Books, and we may naturally expect that the closing verse of the epistle will have great weight in it. This seems to be the practical conclusion of the whole matter upon which John had been writing, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

This epistle is specially perfumed with love. As you read it, you cannot help realizing that it was written by a very tender, gentle hand, and yet, when this loving writer is giving his last words in this epistle, the admonition with which he closes is this, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." As love thus speaks in its fullness, let us be ready to give earnest attention to the message which it utters.

John has, in this epistle, written much concerning the love of Jesus, as well he might, for he knew more about that love than any other man knew. And yet, when he had written concerning love to Jesus, he was moved to an intense jealousy lest, by any means, the hearts of those to whom he wrote should be turned aside from that dear Lover of their souls who deserved their entire affection, and therefore not only love to them, but also love to Jesus, made him wind up his letter with these significant words, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

I. My first observation shall be concerning THE TITLE UNDER WHICH WE ARE HERE ADDRESSED—"Little children."

I do not think that John meant, literally, to address little children. Nor do I think he merely referred to a certain class of believers who are very little in grace and therefore are called "babes" in contrast to those who are men in Christ. But I think he addressed himself to the whole body of believers to whom he was writing, and through them, that he addressed the whole church of Christ when he wrote, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

This is, *first, a title of deep affection*. The Christian church is the home of Christian love. When it is what it should always be, it is a family—it is "the household of faith," of which God Himself is the Father, the Lord Jesus is the Elder brother, and all the members are brethren—all equal, all one in Christ Jesus, all seeking to serve the rest, laying themselves out to be servants to the whole band of brothers and sisters in Christ.

It seems most appropriate that an aged apostle, such as John doubtless was when he wrote this epistle, should have looked round upon the younger members of the Lord's family and should have called them "little children." And when we recollect how much he knew and above all, how much he had seen of Jesus, how he had fallen at the feet of his glorified Lord as one who was dead, and then had had the pierced hand of Jesus laid upon him to raise him up—when we remember how he had heard the blowing of the seven trumpets and seen the pouring out of the seven vials, how he had beheld a door opened in heaven, how he had counted the foundations of the glorious city, and gazed within its streets of gold, and heard the music of the celestial harps—I do not wonder that such a man with such a mind and heart, so full of God, must, as he looked upon the rest of his brethren, have regarded them, without any egotism, as still remaining as "little children."

It is a familiar, endearing mode of speech such as I think should often be coming from the lips of aged saints. At any rate, if our expressions are not exactly the same as John's, the love to which the expression was thus given should burn in each one of our hearts. Like as a father loves his children, so should the pastor love his flock, so should the teacher love his class—and he may speak to them in such terms as these, "My little children."

Mark, next, that *in this title there is much that indicates good*. John calls those to whom he wrote, "children"—children of God, he means, and he calls them "*little* children." Now, it is a good thing to be even little children in Christ, for this is an indication that the new birth has taken place. If this is the case with us, we are not now men or women in sin, but children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

What a priceless privilege it is to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit! There is a so-called "regeneration" by a priestly ceremony which leaves the man or the child as unregenerate as he was before the ceremony had been performed. But the regeneration by the Holy Spirit entirely changes the nature of the person concerned and bestows upon him or her a new heart and a right spirit. To have this high privilege is to have one of the choicest gifts of heaven—indeed, it is that which is essential to the enjoyment of all other blessings.

So, however humble the title, "little children," may be, it is an indication of much good, for it is no small thing to be a little child in Christ Jesus and to be able even to lisp, as a little child might, "Abba, Father," and to say, with all the rest of God's family, "Our Father, who art in heaven."

The title, "little children," also *indicates the humility of those who are rightly called by that name*. A little child is not proud. He meddles not with high things. He is content to sit at his father's feet or to lie in his mothers bosom. And Christians, being born again—born from above—become as little children, otherwise they could not enter the kingdom of heaven.

They were very great people once, but they are very little now. They thought, at one time, that they were really growing as they grew bigger in their own estimation, but now they understand that they are growing in the best fashion when they are growing smaller. Growing Christians reckon themselves to be nothing. But full-grown Christians count themselves less than nothing. And when we feel ourselves to be "less than the least of all saints," then we are indeed making good progress in the divine life. To grow less and less in your own esteem is the right kind of growth. Naturally, we grow up from childhood to manhood, but *spiritually*, we grow down from manhood to childhood—yet it is not really growing down, but growing up as we increase in humility.

Moreover, *this title denotes teachableness*. A little child will go to school. A little child is not above learning its letters. We cannot often get men to do this, especially in spiritual things. They are so crusted over with prejudice that they think they know all they need to know, yet it is little that they do know, and even that little is wrong, yet it is enough to keep them from being willing to be taught what they really need to learn.

Truly blessed is the man who is a little child in relation to God. I believe that very often great knowledge and more especially *great pretensions* to knowledge of science and philosophy, stand in men's way and prevent them from learning what is most worth learning. God forbid that I should say anything in praise of ignorance! Yet I think that I might, in spiritual things, give it greater praise than I could give to "philosophy" or "science falsely so-called."

Happy and wise were the shepherds to whom the angels came and sang and spoke concerning the birth of Jesus, for in their simplicity, they went straight away to Bethlehem and found the newborn King. But the wise men (happy, too, for a star came to guide them), in their very wisdom seemed to make mistakes, for they went to Jerusalem and inquired, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" And so, for a time, they lost their way—and caused Herod to seek the life of the Holy Child Jesus.

Well did Augustine say, "Shepherds and artisans oft enter the kingdom of heaven while wise men and scholars are fumbling to find the latch." Know all you can that is really worth knowing, but with your knowledge, mind that you have the child-like spirit without which all your knowledge will be of little service to you. After all, there is not much difference between those who are called wise men and

those who know but little, for the wisest of men really know but little—and if they are truly wise, they know that they know but little.

There are some, nowadays, who think themselves to be such wise men that they even pretend to know more than God knows or has revealed to us in His Word. They sit upon the throne of judgment and call God Himself before them and arraign Him, rejudge His judgments, and profess to be the god of God! Such “wise” men are the most credulous fools of the age.

I pity the poor creatures who believe in popish miracles, but I have now learned to think that those who can believe in such frauds are not half such dolts as the men who try to teach us that inanimate matter has fashioned itself into those marvelously beautiful shapes in which we see it all over this wondrous world which God created “in the beginning.”

Set these “wise” men up on a pinnacle in the center of the court of fools and let the hugest fools’ caps that were ever made be placed upon their heads. When they sneer at the credulity of believers in Christ, we can tell them to look at home, for there are none who are so credulous as they are. And let us still come to God’s Book as little children who are willing to be taught by God’s Spirit all that God’s Son has to say to our hearts.

And little, children, too, have *faith*. What a great deal of faith they usually have and how wicked it is for anyone ever to trifle with the faith of little children! It is really scandalous when nurses and others tell little children idle tales and foolish stories, which the children believe to be true. We should be very careful and jealous concerning the faith which a little child reposes in its elders, and never do or say anything to weaken their belief.

Little children have a very beautiful faith, especially when the word of their father is concerned. They *know* that what he says is true. They laugh at the idea that their father would ever tell a lie. Let us be little children of that sort towards God, unquestioningly believing whatever He says to us—not asking how or why it is so, but being quite prepared to be told that we cannot yet understand everything, and that all we have to do is implicitly believe all that our Heavenly Father says. If it be God who speaks, believe ye what He says, and say with the confidence of a little child, “My Father cannot lie.”

So far, we see that it is a good thing to be called little children. But I think there is another view of the matter which we must not forget, for *the title also implies weakness*. “Little children”—that is all we are at the very best—little children are very apt to be led astray and so are we. We all of us feel the influence of others and we sometimes feel it more than we would like to confess.

And it is a singular thing that probably there are no persons who are so much influenced by others as those who themselves influence others. The leaders are often those who are most led and therefore we need to be extremely cautious. Surrounded as we are by hosts of idolaters, we are all too apt to be swayed by their example, so John says to us, “Little children, do not be led into evil by those who are around you. Try to be men in this respect and dare to do right even if you stand alone. Stand fast and quit yourselves like men. Be not carried about by every wind that blows, but stand like a mighty rock that is immovable.”

Little children, too have this weakness, that they have need, as a rule, of something to see. You cannot teach them so well in any other way as you can by pictures and models. That tendency is also manifest in us spiritually—we have a craving for signs and symbols. The great mass of people—even Christian people—want something or other that they can see.

Like Israel in the wilderness, they say, “Make us gods which shall go before us.” If they cannot have a god in some visible shape, then they need some ceremony, some ritual, something or other that is not purely spiritual. As the girl wants her doll and the boy his rocking horse, so those who are little children in spiritual things seem to want some article which they can see and touch.

Oh, that we were men enough to believe in the spiritual—to be content with God’s revelation without needing anything symbolical except the two grand symbols which Christ has given us in His two ordinances—and never putting even those out of their proper place, much less wishing to overlay them with any adornments of our own, but worshipping Him, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth and

yielding ourselves up to the guidance of His gracious Spirit, who will teach us how to worship God acceptably!

Little children also have a very bounded range. Put a little child down with a few broken platters and a little dirt, and he will amuse himself by the hour together. It does not seem to strike him that he may grow up to be a man and have to work for his living, or manage big business like his father does. It is, under some aspects, a great blessing to be such a child as that, but it is a pity that we are so prone to be thus childish spiritually.

We are so much engrossed in the present that if we have a little trouble, we fret over it as if that trouble would last for years. If we meet with a little discouragement, we are worried by it and seem to forget the heaven that is awaiting us, the God who rules over all, the divine Comforter who is ever near us, and the unerring wisdom which will bring good out of evil.

Our sphere of observation is too confined—we are too much taken up with the present and do not turn our eyes across the gulf of time to that fair glory-land where the day has broken and the shadows have forever fled away. Little children, it is because of this special weakness of yours that the apostle has said, “Keep yourselves from idols.”

II. This remark brings me to the second part of my subject, which is this—THE WARNING WHICH IS DIRECTED TO US—“Keep yourselves from idols.”

I hope that I need not say to you, dear friends, *Keep yourselves from all sorts of visible idols*, for I trust that you abhor them as much as I do. Yet in this present age, idol temples are being set up almost everywhere by our Ritualistic clergy, [See Twelve Sermons on Ritualism by C. H. Spurgeon] and a form of idolatry that is on a par with the fetishism of ignorant Africans has come back to this land, for they make a god out of a bit of bread, and after worshipping their idol, eat it up—a process which can only be fitly described in such sarcasm as Elijah would have poured upon it if he could have stood in the midst of these modern priests of Baal as he stood amongst their prototype of old.

Keep yourselves, beloved, from all their idols. Pay no reverence to them, nor to their so-called “priests.” It is strange that now, when men have open Bibles and can read them, there should come back to us the old idolatry which our fathers abhorred, and which even in the days of dim religious light, their ancestors could not endure.

Do not endure it for a moment, but make your protest against it every day in the most earnest possible manner, and let the cry ring out to any Christians who are mingled with the idolaters, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.” God will surely punish this land and every other land where these or any other idols are set up.

But to you, dear friends, I must speak concerning other idols. First, *keep yourselves from worshipping yourselves*. Alas, how many fall into this gross sin! Some do it by indulgence at the table. How much of eating, and especially of drinking, is there which, correctly speaking, is nothing better than gluttony and drunkenness!

There are professing Christians who, perhaps, never are regarded as intoxicated, yet they sip, and sip, and sip until, if they do not lose the control of their brain, they cause observers to raise the question whether they ever had any at all. It is almost a pity for some professing Christians that they can thus indulge themselves at home, for if, like working men, they had to go home from the tippling-shop, it would soon be discovered that they were scarcely able to walk straight and the evil habit might be cured.

It is a scandalous thing when there is such a sin as this in the church of God. And as it has been known, I urge all of you, beloved, to see to it that you offer no sacrifices to gluttony, nor pour out libations to Bacchus—for if you do, you prove that you are idolaters worshipping your own bellies and that God’s love dwells not within you.

There are others who worship themselves by living a life of indolence. They have nothing to do and they seem to do it very thoroughly. They take their ease and that is the main thing in which they take any interest. They flit from pleasure to pleasure, from show to show, from vanity to vanity as if this life were only a garden in which butterflies might fly from flower to flower, and not a sphere where serious work

was to be done, and all-important business for eternity was to be accomplished. Worship not yourselves by trifling as these indolent people do.

Some worship themselves by decorating their bodies most elaborately. Their first and their last thought being, "What shall we wear?" Fall not into that idolatry.

Then *there are some people who make idols of their wealth*. Getting money seems to be the main purpose of their lives. Now, it is right that a Christian man should be diligent in business—he should not be second to anybody in the diligence with which he attends to the affairs of this life. But it is always a pity when we can be truthfully told, "So-and-So is getting richer every year, but he has also gotten stingier. He gives less now than he gave when he had only half as much as he now has."

We occasionally meet with people like the man who, when he was comparatively poor, gave his guinea—but when he grew rich, he only gave a shilling. His explanation was that when he had a shilling purse, he had a guinea heart, but when he had a guinea purse, he found that he had only a shilling heart. But it is always a pity when hearts grow smaller as means grow greater.

Remember, dear friends, that it will be only a little while ere you must leave all that you have. What is the use of your having it at all unless you really enjoy it and how can you so truly enjoy it as by laying it at your Savior's feet and using it for His glory? There is certainly more lasting enjoyment to be gained out of the unrighteous mammon in this way than in any other that I ever heard of—this is the testimony of those who have tried it and proved it to be so. I trust that none of you will worship the golden calf.

Some worship the pursuit which they have undertaken. They give their whole soul up to their art, or their particular calling, whatever it may be. In a certain sense, this is a right thing to do, yet we must never forget that the first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This must always have the first place.

Let me here touch a very tender point. *There are some who make idols of their dearest relatives and friends.* Some have done this with their children. I remember reading a story of a good man who seemed as if he could never forgive God for taking away his child. He sat in a Quakers' meeting bowed down and sorrowful, and his time of deliverance came when a sister rose, uttered these words, "Verily, I perceive that children are idols," and then resumed her seat.

Such a message as that is often needed—yet it is a pity that it should be. Make no idol of your child, or your wife, or your husband, for by putting them into Christ's place, you really provoke Him to take them from you. Love them as much as you please—I would that some loved their children, their husbands, or their wives more than they do—but always love them in such a fashion that Christ shall have the first place in your hearts.

The catalog of idols that we are apt to worship is a very long one. Hindus are said to have many millions of idols and it would take me a very long while to make a list of the various forms which the idolatry of the heart will take. But in a sentence, let me say to you—Remember that God has a right to your whole being. There is nothing, and there can be nothing, which ought to be supreme in your affections save your Lord. And if you worship any thing or any ideal, whatever it may be, if you love that more than you love your God, you are an idolater, and you are disobeying the command of the text, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

So pray to Him, with Toplady,—

*"The idols tread beneath thy feet,
And to thyself the conquest get:
Let sin no more oppose my Lord,
Slain by the Spirit's two-edged sword."*

I would say to you, beloved, in closing my observations upon this point—in *the matter of your faith, be sure to keep yourselves from the idol of the hour.* Some of us have lived long enough to see the world's idols altered any number of times. Just now, in some professedly Christian churches, the idol is

“intellectualism,” “culture,” “modern thought.” Whatever name it bears, it has no right to be in a Christian church, for it believes very little that appertains to Christ.

Now, I have some sort of respect for a downright honest infidel, like Voltaire or Tom Paine, but I have none for the man who goes to college to be trained for the Christian ministry and then claims to be free to doubt the deity of Christ, the need of conversion, the punishment of the wicked, and other truths that seem to me to be essential to a full proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.

Such a man must have strange views of honesty—and so has the minister who goes into a pulpit and addresses people, when he knows that he does not believe any of the doctrines that are dearer to them than their own lives. Yet the moment he is called to account for his unbelief, he cries out, “Persecution! Persecution! Bigotry! Bigotry!”

A burglar, if I found him outside my bedroom door and held him till the policeman came, might consider me to be very bigoted, because I did not care to have my property stolen by him and because I interfered with his liberty. So, in like manner, I am called bigoted because I will not allow a man to come and assail, from my own pulpit, the truths which are dearer to me than my life. I am quite willing to give that man liberty to go and publish his views somewhere else, and at his own expense, but it shall not be done at my expense, nor in the midst of a congregation gathered by me for the worship of God and the proclamation of His truth as they are revealed in the Scriptures. Keep yourselves from this idol of the times, for it is the precursor of death to any church that gives it admittance.

Unitarianism, to which this so-called liberality of thought always goes, is a religion of a parasitical kind. It flourishes by feeding upon the life of other churches, just as the ivy clings to the oak and sucks the life out of it. Let us tear this ivy down wherever we find it beginning its deadly work.

Believe me, my brethren, that the church of Christ, if not the world, shall yet learn that the highest culture is a heart that is cultivated by divine grace, that the truest science is the science of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and that the greatest thought and the deepest of all metaphysics are found at the foot of the cross. And that the men who will keep on simply and earnestly preaching the old-fashioned Gospel—and the people who will stand fast in the old paths are they who will most certainly win the victory.

When those who are sailing in a frail bark—which they or their fellow sinners have constructed, without a rudder and without a pilot at the helm, shall drift away, and be dashed to pieces upon the rocks—they who trust in the Lord and have Him as their Pilot shall be kept clear of the rocks on which others have made shipwreck, and shall be safely steered into the haven of peace and there be at rest forever.

Many of us are about to gather around the communion table to celebrate the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This ordinance should help us to keep ourselves from idols, for if there is any place where idols disappear, it is at the foot of the cross. Look, by faith, at your Lord and Savior as He hung upon the accursed tree.

*“See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”*

Can you give your heart’s affection to any idol after that? Has not Christ so engrossed your warmest love that no earthly charms have any power to allure you away from Him? Are you not, as it were, fastened up by His nails? Is not your heart pierced with His spear? Are you not so crucified with Christ that the world is dead to you and you are dead to the world?

Bethink you, did Jesus live for self? What provision did He make for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof? Was not His whole life one of self-denial and self-renunciation? What idol did He ever set up? To what object did He devote His life? Did He seek fame? Did He labor for earthly honor and glory?

Did He hoard up wealth? Did He say to the man of the world, “Applaud Me”? Was He turned aside from His purpose by either the frowning or the fawning of men? You know that it was not so.

Then you who have been washed in His blood, follow Him! O you who are called by His name, do not blaspheme that name among the Gentiles by idolatry of any kind! Bring out your idols if you have hidden them as Rachel hid her father’s images in the camel’s furniture—bring them all out and let them be broken in pieces at the foot of the cross, or be ground to powder as Moses treated the golden calf that his brother Aaron had made.

O Jesus, where You are, who can worship other but You? If He came and lodged in your house, that child of yours would not be adored as it now is. If He always dwelt there, you would not pamper yourself as you now do.

If you could see Him as He is, you must admit Him to reign within your heart. Well, let it be so as you now, by faith, gaze upon Him, and as these dear memorials of His broken body and His blood are fed upon by you, and you remember Him, do with all your idols as the Ephesians did with their magical books—bring them out and let them be burned—a blessed holocaust in honor of Him who “hath loved us, and hath given himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.”

Sing with Cowper, and let the prayer ascend to your Lord from the very depths of your heart.

*“The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.*

*“So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.”*

God bless you. And if any of you are living without Christ, perhaps it is some beloved idol that is keeping you from Him. If so, may you be delivered from its thrall by coming to Jesus just now, for His dear name’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 JOHN 5

Verse 1. *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God:*

Where there is real faith in Jesus Christ as the Anointed of God, there is the evidence that the new birth has taken place. Let the first, the best, and the clearest proof of our regeneration be the fact that we do verily and in our heart believe that Jesus is the Christ.

1. *And every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.*

If we really love God with our whole heart, we must equally love Jesus Christ, and we shall also love all His people, for they are one with Him.

2. *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments.*

For love leads to imitation. If we truly love the children of God, we shall imitate them. And they are known by these distinguishing characteristics—that they love their Heavenly Father and keep His commandments.

3. *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

Obedience is the flower of love. Where obedience to God does not exist, no love to God exists. It is a mockery for us to talk about emotions of the heart if there are not actions that correspond with them.

4. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world;

The new life is the conquering life. The old must give place to the new. The world, that is one day to be finally overthrown, is already overcome by the child of God.

4. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

For it brings a better and brighter world before us, and opening to us the eternal, takes away from us the charms and allurements of the temporal.

5. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

No one else can overcome the world. But where there is true faith in Christ, it creates within the heart a holy valor by which the conquest of the world is achieved. The law tells us to overcome the world, but the Gospel of God's grace enables us to do it. The legal spirit knows that it ought to conquer the world, but the evangelical spirit does conquer it.

6. This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

The cleansing of the outward life does not stand alone, but it is accompanied by the putting away of sin from the heart. The two must go together and no man will ever rightly value the cleansing water unless he equally values the atoning blood.

It is said by some that the preaching of the doctrine of the full and free forgiveness of sin which is bestowed upon all who exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, will lead men to carelessness of life. But it has quite the opposite effect. The cleansing of the life, by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit through the Word, becomes incumbent upon us when once we are washed from sin in the precious blood of Jesus. The atonement is the true guarantee of holiness.

7-8. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

What a blessing it is for us to get the witness of these three, even here on earth, in the new life which is created within our souls by the Holy Spirit—the daily cleansing of our life by that same blessed Spirit through the Word, and the continual application by the Spirit of that precious blood by which peace is given to the conscience and sin is put away from the heart. [This subject is explained more fully by Mr. Spurgeon in his sermon #1187, The Three Witnesses]

9-10. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:

That very faith becomes to him the best witness and he is able to confirm the witness of his faith that he is a partaker of the salvation of Christ.

10-11. He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

That is the Gospel in brief—what Luther would have called a little Bible, containing a condensation of the whole revelation of God.

12. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

He may exist. He may have that which may be called moral, physical, or animal life—but there is such a thing as existing, ay, and existing forever, without even a particle of “life” in the apostle’s sense of the word, in the Scriptural sense of the word. And blessed and happy are those who do not merely exist, but who have, by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, been brought into that living inner circle and have been made to live, really to live in Christ.

13-14. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us:

First we believe, and so we prove that we have eternal life. Then we climb up to the full assurance of faith. From full assurance we mount still higher to the clear conviction that God hears prayer—and from that height we mount yet higher to the assured confidence that He will hear our prayer.

15-16. *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death,*

What then? He shall run all over the place and tell everybody of it? Oh, no! That is not what the apostle says, yet I have seen something like that carried into practice. But when I look into this inspired Book, I do not see anything about talking of this sin to our fellow men, but something is said about talking of it to God, and this is what every true Christian should do. If you see any man sin, mind that you ask for pardon for the erring one, “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death,”

16. *He shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.*

John does not say that he may not—and as we cannot be absolutely sure that any sin is a sin unto death, this verse does not prevent us from praying for any man, whatever his sin may have been. John says, writing under inspiration, “There is a sin unto death.” “What is it?” someone asks. Ah! would you really like to know? If you did know, you could go and commit all other sins except that one, could you not? But would that be any help to your piety? Certainly not.

You know that, sometimes, a notice to this effect is put up as a warning, “Man-traps and spring guns set on these premises.” And do you go and knock at the door and say, “Will you kindly tell me where the man-traps and spring guns are?” No, for it is the fact that you do not know where they are that keeps you out of the premises.

In like manner, somewhere in the fields of sin, there is one great man-trap which John calls “a sin unto death”—but you need not need to know what that sin is, nor where that trap is set—your business is to keep as far away from all sin as you can, whether it is unto death, or not unto death.

17. *All unrighteousness is sin:*

If a thing is not right—if it is not right all round, it is sin, you can be sure of that. I heard the other day of a man who was said to be a splendid Christian God-wards, but a wretched creature man-wards. But there cannot be such a monstrosity as that. Such a man as that was not a Christian at all. Our righteousness, if it is real and true, must be an all-round righteousness, towards men as well as towards God.

17-18. *And there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*

That is to say, sin is not the bent of his renewed nature. It would not be a fair description of his life to say that he was living a sinful life. There are spots in the sun, but the sun itself is a great mass of brightness. So is it with the Christian’s life—it is not a sinful life although there are imperfections in it.

19-21. *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.*

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